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2016 SPRING ARTS & DINING ISSUE

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EAT FOR THE NEW PERFORMING
ARTS SEASON

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MARCH 17-30, 2016

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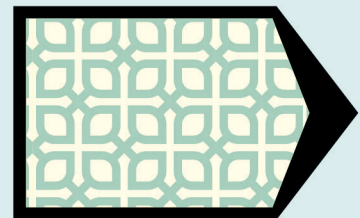
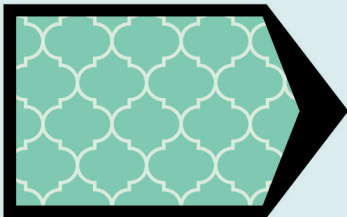
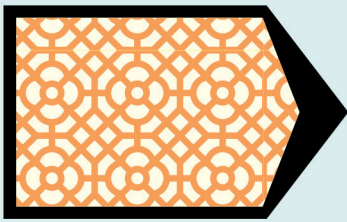
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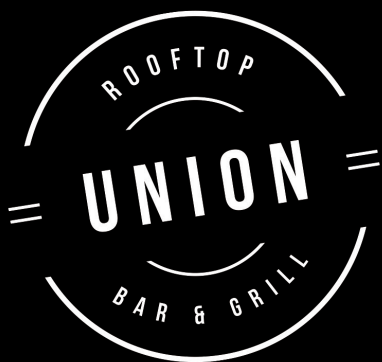


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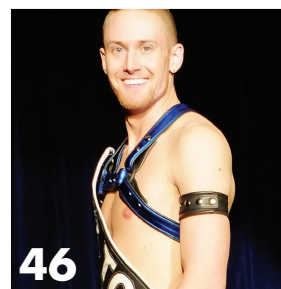
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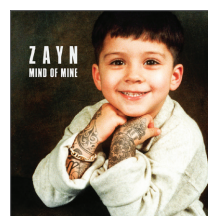


Page 14: Mathew Janczewski, photo by Armour Photography. Page 30: Photo by Dan Norman. Page 46: Photo by Steve Lenius. Page 48: Photo by Randy Stern.

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ON THE COVER

Our Spring Arts Issue is all about what and who to see...and where to eat. Photo from *Charm* by Rich Ryan

Inset photos:

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Everyday Epicurean

Oh, this is a gorgeous issue. I can say that because I'm not touting my own work, but showing off what others have allowed us to use. Look at the photos in the choreographer piece, the photos of the upcoming performances in the Spring Arts & Dining Pairings. We have such talented people here in the Twin Cities who not only put together tremendous productions for us to see, but also people who photograph what goes into those productions...the players, sets, costumes, lighting, and so much more. Our arts scene here is remarkable and our artists are accessible.

The same can be said for our dining and drink scene. We can walk into an establishment and talk to the chefs, the owners, the bartenders, the pastry chefs, the hosts, the servers. We can find them in food trucks and friend them on Facebook. We can interface with the people who design and make the works of art that we eat and drink. The producers and directors and players and costumers of the food and drink world. We are so fortunate.

I often pair up dining with going to see performances, whether before or after a show. I could free-associate such food and performance pairings while sipping some coffee and staring at the stars, it's so fun. They're often fairly loosely pulled together, and may say more about my mind than anything, so even my impulses are entertainment to me. As an example, *Lasso of Truth* made me want to go eat some of our own Wonder Woman's Greek creations at Gardens of Salonica, which may have plenty to do with Diana Prince coming from Amazons of Greek mythology...and suddenly I find myself enjoying the best lamb shank before going to the Walking Shadow Theatre Company's production at the Playwrights' Center.

Sometimes, though, I can't say that I want to have two competing interests in one night. When the food is so amazing and such an experience, to try to make it to a show would be too much. It might be gilding the lily and not giving each experience its own time and attention. So, in such cases, I like to keep the dining separate from the performances and make it the entertainment. Here's a list of what I keep on my radar for dining-as-entertainment experiences.

Make a reservation for a chef's table experience or tasting menu. We're the VIPs for a show that's just for us; written, directed, and acted by the restaurant's visionary in charge. Where it used to be that there might be a table that showed up in the kitchen for people to book out for a whole lot of dough and enjoy the meals and melee of all the hard work and talent of the chef and team, now restaurants are designing and building the experience into their spaces. Chef Erick Harcey at Upton 43 just killed me dead with a 10-course menu, including what I've avoided my whole life but loved from him: lutefisk. Chef Landon Schoenefeld built in Birdie adjacent to Nighthawks for a chef's table experience with a room of its own. Or, do the tastings and pairings with wine and food at Corner Table or beer and food at Surly's Brewer's Table. There are so many possibilities out there for your style of enjoyment.

Take a cooking class with a local chef. I love watching the Instagram feed of Kitchen in the Market during one of the Chef's Night Offs. People buy tickets to go and cook with a predetermined chef from one of the hot and local restaurants...and then we watch the tasty hilarity ensue. The participants have jobs, learn from the pros, and eat and drink to a level of contentment that is enviable. And then sometimes you get some chef cameos when someone else from the food mecca in Midtown Global Market stops by and it becomes a party.

Subscribe to a food delivery service and have a ready-to-prepare meal show up at the front door. Local Crate is a box of tasty entertainment. I can go on the website (www.localcratemeals.com), order up the menus I'm interested in preparing, and a box of prepackaged assembly-ready vittles arrives with a recipe and instructions that make for a choose-your-own-adventure kind of meal. If I want something easy to make before leaving for the evening, I can order up something according to that level. If I want to have some people over and put us all to work making our meal, I can get a more difficult recipe and we can all muddle through it together. The results are predictable, which is also a great bonus to being sent a tried-and-true box of a DIY dinner.

And, of course, there are a number of ways to get your art with a side of something delicious at all sorts of venues. Tongue in Cheek gives free dessert to MPR members, drawing a wonderful connection between food and media/arts. I went to Meritage the other night after a dance performance at the Ordway and am now convinced that the after-show noshing on cheese plates, pommes frites, macarons, and sipping armagnac is a sumptuous nightcap. I am a fan of hitting up the in-venue eateries like Fika in the American Swedish Institute, Agra Culture in Minneapolis Institute of Art, and Level Five Cafe at the Guthrie. Just the other day, I had a ham and Jarlsburg waffle at Norway House before taking in the photography exhibit. Superb.

Dive into what we've got with gusto. Devour our arts and food scene. Delight in the richness.

I'll see you in the seats and at the tables.

With you and with thanks,

Andy ■



Andy

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Maundy Thursday Stations & Labyrinth: March 24, 6:30 - 8:00 pm

Good Friday Service: March 25, 7:00 pm with guest ensemble Smaller Mahler
A Soup Supper will be served at 6:00 p.m.

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A Picture is Worth...

Fifty-two years ago, I found it one of the most hateful, enraging, and sad images I'd ever seen. I've viewed hundreds, no thousands, of photographs, many bloodier and more ghastly as far as the explicit content, but none that I feel that present a more casually evil, more despairing, or less hopeful picture of one aspect of American life.

Two men, legs crossed, relax in their seats; one fishes in a bag of Redman tobacco for another plug; they smile, as do others in the background. Their faces beam with the furtive, shared glee of seventh-grade boys gloating after they've successfully tormented the substitute teacher. The epitome of thoughtless, boys-will-be-boys mischievousness. Except these "little rascals" got away with murder.

The photo was taken in Philadelphia, Mississippi, during the trial for the 1964 killings of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. The State of Mississippi had refused to pursue the case; it was not until 1967 that the federal government charged 18 with the killings (the three were waylaid and murdered by KKK members and local police, their bodies buried in a red clay dam), of


whom only seven were convicted and given minor sentences.

41 years later to the day, June 21, 2005, the State of Mississippi brought to trial one man, Edgar Ray Killen, former Klan kleagel (organizer), who had helped orchestrate the killings. He was charged and convicted on three counts of manslaughter and sentenced to a 60-year term in the Mississippi State Penitentiary, a.k.a. "Parchman Farm."

Why does that faded image come to mind now? Because it hasn't faded. Look on the news, in the papers, on Facebook. Just recently you could see the same sly savagery on today's KKK goons; taken in the aftermath of a rally where they stabbed three objectors with the sharpened staff of an American flag.

And even as the KKK is visible daily on the national scene, there is an aspirant to the highest position in the land who denies he knows neither David Duke, KKK Grand Wizard, specifically, nor of the KKK in general, being loath, without "further research," to say bad things about them.

Look up that old photo for yourself. It was our past; must it be our future? ■



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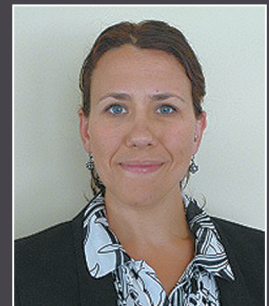


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CARL FLINK

photo by Heidi Bohenkamp

THAT MOVE US



BY JOHN MARK

‡ Special thanks to Galen Higgins, Kole Nelson, Bill Cameron ‡

The Art of Exhaustion: Carl Flink

Black Label Movement

Year Founded: 2005

www.blacklabelmovement.com

Carl Flink likes to imagine his dancers as animals. “I have never asked someone to join the company without first having the image of some animal come to my mind... I have no idea why this is the case, but I know I am drawn to people who move with the natural flow and unthinking grace of animals versus the hyper-refined approach many highly trained dance artists manifest. I call this ‘natural virtuosity.’” The gibbons, leopards, grey wolfs, and big horned sheep that make up Black Label Movement must also possess an incredible amount of stamina.

Embedded in Flink’s innovative choreography is also a belief in representing each of his dancers as heavy lifters, regardless of gender. “An ethic of this company is that everyone lifts and everyone is lifted. With the male/female clichés still so prevalent in dance-making and partnering work, this approach allows us to break down assumptions of who can lift and who will be lifted to powerful social affect. My 2014 work *An Unkindness of Ravens* is a particularly strong example of this approach in

which almost every permutation of partnering work appears on stage.”

While athleticism is clearly valued by Flink, his work can be just as intellectual as it is physical. In 2014, he began a collaboration with biologist and science journalist John Bohannon and biomedical engineer David Odde, called the Moving Cell Project, which has taken Black Label Movement to four different TED Talk presentations around the world. It’s clear that collaboration is something that excites Carl Flink, whether it be in the science community, the theatre community, the Minnesota Orchestra, or with other dance choreographers, like his upcoming collaboration with Marciano Silva dos Santo’s (see pg. 20) Contempo Physical Dance at the Cowles Center in June.

Flink is well aware of the reputation he carries for pushing dancers to the brink of exhaustion. “I am nearly obsessed with the edge of what we can endure as humans. How far can we push ourselves? I am drawn to observing and experiencing the physical, emotional, and mental choices and decisions people make when under pressure... I ask [my dancers] to engage movement that pushes them beyond their comfort zone to the edge of where they don’t know if they will succeed or fail in accomplishing the movement. That moment between success and failure is one that holds a lot of information for understanding who we are.”

A Collective Power: Dancebums

Dancebums

Year Founded: 2013

www.dancebums.com

A collective of five dance artists born in the year 1990, Dancebums defies conventions with a structure that places each company member on an even plane. When Kara Motta, Margaret Johnson, Karen McMenemy, Eben Kowler, and Maggie Zepp created Dancebums three years ago, I was admittedly skeptical of the collective structure. However, it quickly became clear that success was inevitable, especially with their dedication to these seven commandments, written at the company's inception: 1. *There are no mistakes.* 2. *Not everything is right.* 3. *We are all different from each other.* 4. *Love. Love. Love.* 5. *Playing. You are always playing; witnessing is participating.* 6. *We, as individuals, have natural authority.* 7. *Talking can be a trap, have an escape plan. [Say] Bananas.*

While the Dancebums, as a company, began in 2013, the history of their relationship and the true origin story began in 2008, when Johnson, McMenemy, and Motta began their studies at the University of Minnesota Dance Program, where Kowler had already begun his

training, and Zepp would soon follow. As Kowler explained, "After school, there was this moment where I think we all realized that even though Minneapolis is a rich place for the arts, not many artists were necessarily making the work we saw ourselves dancing in. We rented a share of a studio in the Calhoun Arts building and started meeting just to dance together."

With similar backgrounds, Johnson described the union as something inherent, "We are of course inspired, challenged, supported by, and a product of the Twin Cities dance community. We have all trained and worked with people in this city and I think that shows through in the dance we make. It's literally in our bodies."

In addition to the allure of their collective energy, the Dancebums are uniquely dedicated to choreographing modern work that doesn't take itself too seriously, a rare attribute for individuals with such rigorous concert dance training. As Zepp explained, "A lot of times our ideas for dances and concepts come out of jokes we make with each other. We try not to shy away from the 'wrong' choice or making a dance that we're 'too smart' to make... There's a mutual desire to create work that toes the line between serious concert dance and fun, party dances that our friends could do."



DANCEBUMS

photo by Bill Cameron



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KAREN CHARLES

photo by Summer Street Photography

The Threads That Connect Us: Karen Charles

Threads Dance Project

Year Founded: 2011

www.threadsdance.org

"I knew over twenty years ago that I wanted to start a company. I recall writing down my idea for a company including the name 'Threads' and the mission to examine, expose, and celebrate the threads that connect us. I also recall sticking the notes in a drawer because I felt like I was not capable of starting a company. The first step to bringing the dream to fruition came when my father died from colon cancer in 2010. I found out he had dreamed of becoming a doctor and never pursued this dream. I was then nudged to not let my dream of a dance company go unfulfilled. My dad left me \$10,000 and I decided to honor him by starting a dance company despite all of my fears and doubts."

With concert work that shows great sensitivity to themes of humanity, it's no surprise that the origin story of Karen Charles' company feels so human as well. Threads Dance Project has become recognized for tackling issues of race, death, and injustice. Particularly since Karen Charles' recent work, *The Secrets of Slave Songs*, was nominated for the 2015 Sage Award for Outstanding Dance Performance.

For her, the need to address these issues is imperative. "I think I always focus on the personal impact first and I am also very passionate about laying bare my truth in regards to these issues. I am unabashed because I think the only way we can make the earth better is by honestly approaching issues and being honest about how we really feel, knowing that some will agree with us and some will disagree. But by getting people to experience these issues through dance opens a different mode of dialogue, which can only lead to better human relationships."

Ballet's Fresh Take: James Sewell

James Sewell Ballet

Year Founded: 1990

www.jsballet.org

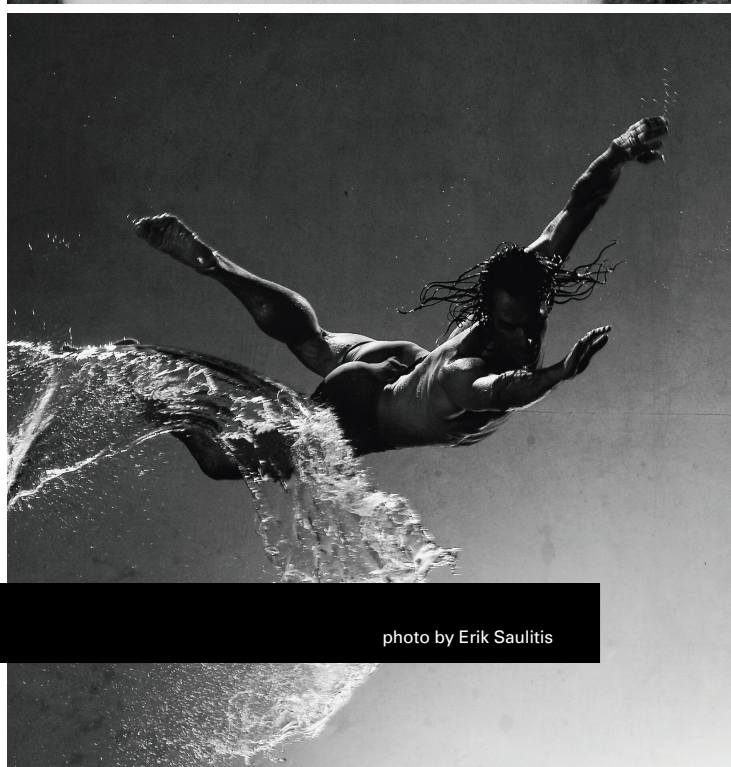
James Sewell Ballet first began in New York City in 1990, before moving to the Twin Cities in 1993. As Sewell explained, "The years in New York City immersed us in the international scene of dance as everything seems to come through that city. Those years were an important launching point for us, but bringing that back to the Twin Cities allowed us to grow, mature and flourish in a way that is actually very difficult in New York City."

While the majority of the company's dancers have a strong classical background, Sewell enjoys taking ballet vocabulary outside the box, and his dancers must follow. "When I'm looking for dancers, I'm looking for people who first have a strong ballet technique and base to work from. From there they need to be open to trying anything, because I never know in which direction I'm going to want to lead them. For me, pushing ballet to deal with subject matters that are not traditionally explored within the ballet vocabulary is exciting and challenging. When I started out as a choreographer I would outline everything in my head before I would begin rehearsals. But now I find it more interesting to collaborate with the dancers in the moment and follow the creative line to places that surprise us all."

True to his explorative tendencies, Sewell is pursuing some remarkable projects in 2016. "This spring I'm looking forward to working with the Edina High School Marching Band on a piece called *Band It*. This will be an energetic piece where I'll be utilizing hover boards and moving musicians on stage. In the fall, we'll be working with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra in presenting Mendelssohn's *Octet*, a piece I will begin choreographing this summer in Big Sky, Montana and complete in Minneapolis. We are also working on presenting our version of the movie documentary, *Titicut Follies*, filmed in Bridgewater prison for the criminally insane in 1966. I will be collaborating with filmmaker Frederick Wiseman to explore this amazing film and find a way to translate the essence of this challenging world to the ballet stage."

JAMES SEWELL

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Cultural Intersections: Marciano Silva dos Santos

Contempo Physical Dance

Year Founded: 2011

www.contempophysicaldance.org

Many Twin Cities audience members, myself included, first noticed Marciano Silva dos Santos as a radiant new performer in TU Dance, shortly after his relocation from Brazil to Minnesota in 2006. It was difficult to take your eyes off of him. Ten years later, Silva dos Santos has established a much-celebrated dance company and garnered numerous recognitions as a choreographer and a performer.

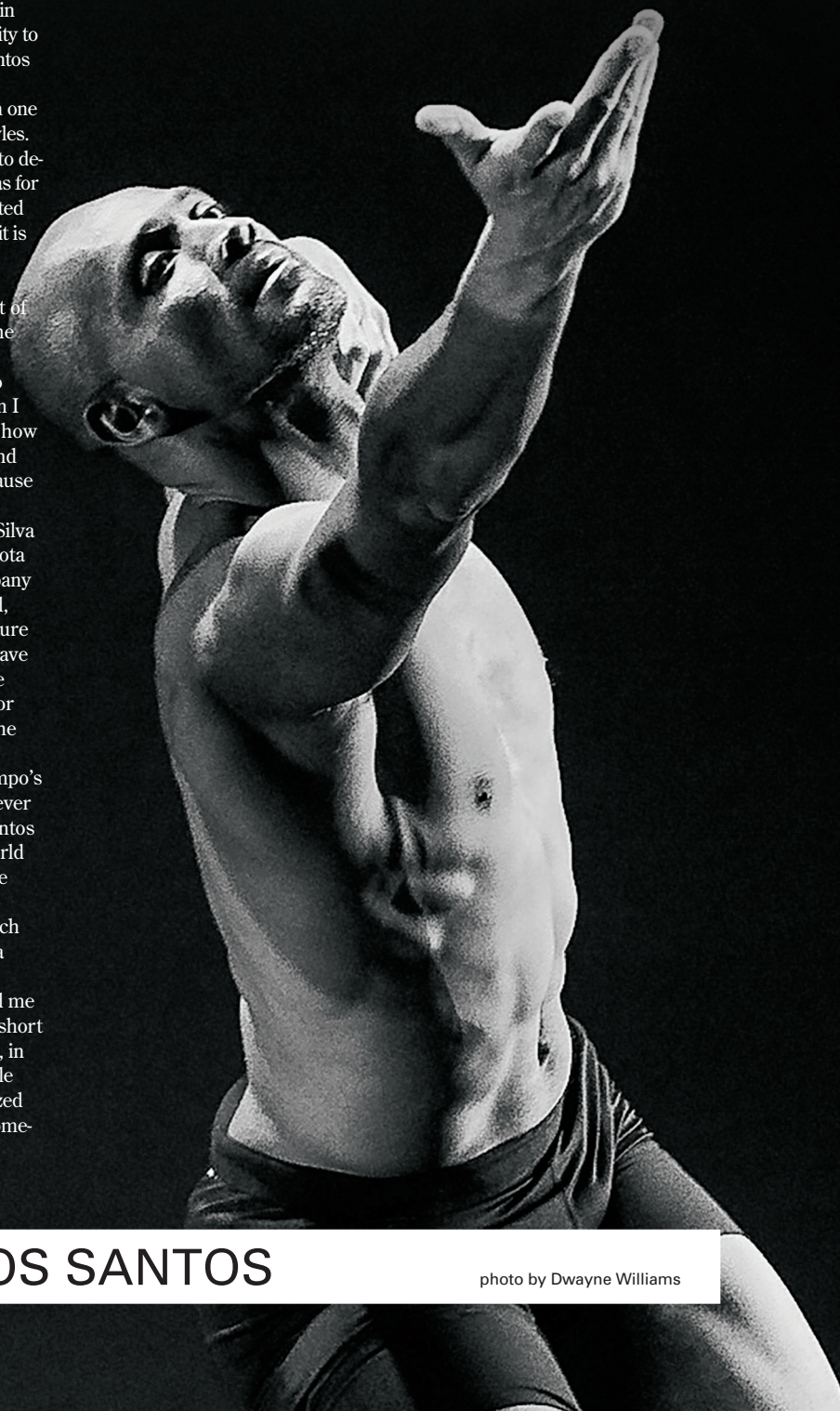
Though Silva dos Santos first intended to focus his studies on acting, after catching the eye of a choreographer who ran a local Afro-Brazilian dance company, his professional career shifted to the world of dance. He later joined a contemporary dance company in the same city of Vitória, Brazil, which allowed him the opportunity to collaborate more with the creation of new work. As Silva dos Santos explained, "These movement experiences introduced me to two very distinct movement styles, but they were kept separate from one another. I was interested in exploring the interaction of these styles. While I was still in Brazil, I started a dance company and began to develop my initial ideas and movement vocabulary. I left those ideas for a time when I came to Minnesota to be a dancer, but they persisted within me. I felt a need to continue my movement research and it is through this desire that Contempo Physical Dance was born."

With a distinct fusion of Afro-Brazilian, capoeira, and contemporary movement, Silva dos Santos' process requires a lot of exploration. "I like to research movement before I arrive in the studio with the dancers. I spend a lot of time exploring movement on my own. I try the movement on my own body first to understand how it will impact the dancers' bodies. Then when I arrive in the studio, I try things out with the dancers and see how it works on their unique bodies. The movement is dynamic and sometimes changes once I am working with the dancers because they bring their own life to the movement."

In regards to the expectations of his company members, Silva dos Santos sets the bar high. As the only company in Minnesota with his unique movement genre, transitioning into the company can be the most difficult part for his dancers. As he explained, "When they join the company, they have to work hard to capture the styles on their body... I want each company member to have a fire behind their dancing. They need to be able to attack the movement and be very precise, but at the same time, I look for subtle qualities such as expression and an ease within all of the physicality."

A most anticipated event in the Twin Cities will be Contempo's show with Black Label Movement, the Cowles Center's first-ever collaborative dance concert. Both Carl Flink and Silva dos Santos are tremendously excited. "Performances will feature two world premieres: a duet with myself and Carl Flink and an ensemble work blending our two diverse and intensely physical styles."

It's inspiring to see this budding choreographer achieve such excellence in the Twin Cities after moving from South America only ten years ago. Silva dos Santos is quick to credit our local scene for its support. "The Twin Cities community encouraged me to go forward with my choreography. When I created my first short work for the Ritz Theater's choreographers' evening, *Renovate*, in 2008, it was well received by the community. I remember people asking me when I would create my next work, so I was energized to dig deeper into my movement vocabulary. I felt that I had something different to share with the community."



MARCIANO SILVA DOS SANTOS

photo by Dwayne Williams

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JOE CHVALA

photo by Bill Cameron

late summer/early fall, “We are calling it *Passing Through Pig’s Eye*. It will be an immersive piece that will divide the audience into three groups and bring each group on a tour that happens in downtown St. Paul moving from one location to the next. Each location will feature different pieces of choreography and music by various company members and guests.”

Celebrating 20 Years: Mathew Janczewski ARENA DANCES

Year Founded: 1995

www.arena-dances.org

Though his company recently celebrated 20 years, there is something divinely youthful about Mathew Janczewski’s ARENA DANCES. Whether it be the playful nature of his creation process or his unabashed fusions of concert dance and pop culture, Janczewski’s choreography has maintained cultural relevance and intrigue through the years.

Reflecting on the past 20 years, Janczewski was quick to credit the contributions of his dancers, donors, and board of directors, before speaking on the value of perseverance. “All of my mentors really modeled and embodied the word ‘perseverance.’ Dance-making is a struggle largely because so many people are not exposed to modern dance. So, by necessity, exposing and educating audiences becomes part of the work. Engagement with our audiences has been an important part of the work, though I do not think there is really any strategy or ideology that guides the work itself. When I was dancing with other companies such as Shapiro & Smith Dance, JAZZDANCE, Dancing People Company, along with many others, they taught me to follow my gut. I am making work that excites and interests me and I hope to bring that excitement to my dancers and then to the people we share it with.”

With a busy 20th season, ARENA’s next concert, *TWITCH*, will take place at the Southern Theatre April 1–24. In addition to repertoire, Janczewski will premiere a new work commissioned by the Kevin J. Mossier Foundation. Then, in November, Janczewski is excited to bring the company’s history full circle, “*ANTHEM* is our season finale in November which will be held at the Fitzgerald in St. Paul. This city holds a special place for us, as it’s where Arena first debuted in 1997. For this performance, we are remounting other repertoire favorites, and premiering a new duet that I am very excited about. This new work features myself and longtime ARENA dancer Amy Behm Thomson, who is returning to Minneapolis to perform with me.” This much anticipated performance will likely make for a terrific close to the season!

Rhythm and Theatrical Dance: Joe Chvala

Flying Foot Forum

Year Founded: 1991

www.flyingfootforum.com


While his affinity to percussive movement gives Joe Chvala’s choreography a distinctive flavor, he’s been known and appreciated for shaking things up. “We are always changing what we do within the very wide umbrella of our mission to keep our audiences interested in coming back. The overriding idea of the Flying Foot Forum is to find all the ways that rhythmic dance, percussion, and percussive dance can be stretched onstage. We do pieces that are pure dance and others that are mixed with music and drama. We do short pieces no longer than two minutes and full evening length works. We do pieces that tell very clear narrative stories and very abstract work. We handle all sorts of subjects: dramatic, wild, quiet, sweet, sentimental, outrageous, satirical, funny, etc.”

Outside of Flying Foot Forum’s impressive 24-year legacy, Chvala has also choreographed regularly for the Children’s Theatre Company and the Guthrie. Weaving clear narratives with advanced choreography is no easy task, but Chvala demonstrates a finessed understanding of storytelling through movement. Currently, he’s looking forward to breaking proscenium conventions with a new original work slated for




MATHEW JANCZEWSKI

photo by Armour Photography



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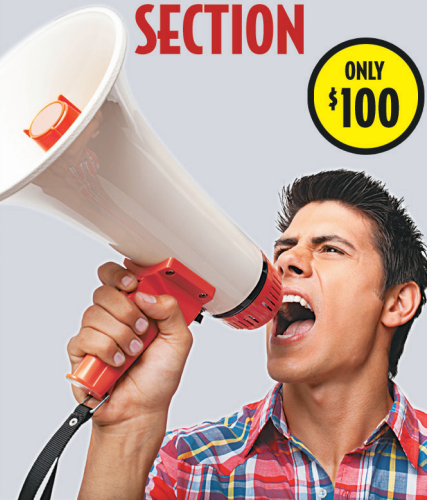
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Generosity and Courage: Uri Sands

TU Dance

Year Founded: 2004

www.tudance.org

A young dancer from Miami, after training at the New World School of the Arts, Uri Sands spent five years working as a principal dancer in the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Sands also had the opportunity to dance for Philadanco, The North Carolina Dance Theatre, Complexions, James Sewell Ballet, and Minnesota Dance Theatre. To work with companies of this caliber was undoubtedly formative to his development as an artist, but Sands credits his mother as a key mentor, “[She] always encouraged me to stay in pursuit of my dreams.”

With a dancing career that allowed him to tour internationally and work with the likes of Judith Jamison, Dwight Roden, and Desmond Richardson, in 2004, Sands shifted gears to start TU Dance with his partner and co-director Toni Pierce-Sands.

Sands’ choreographic style is most often defined as a fusion of modern dance, classical ballet, African-based and urban vernacular, but what I believe sets Sand’s work apart is the commitment he demands of his dancers. Dancing for TU is a full-time job, and in order to find dancers who can deliver the artistry, grace, and technical prowess needed to fulfill his vision and the commitments of the company as a whole, TU

Dance has scouted and relocated dancers from New York City, Baltimore, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C. While their ability to move is of clear importance, Sands prioritizes their emotional components as well, “The most important factors for Toni and I when we select dancers for the company are generosity and courage.”

With Toni Pierce’s vast knowledge of pedagogy, and the dynamic elegance of Sands’ choreographic style, TU Dance has quickly become one of the most celebrated contemporary dance companies in the Twin Cities, winning the 2015 USA Knight Fellowship in Dance, among countless other honors.

Sands attributes a large part of the company’s success to a singular core belief: “The arts (particularly dance) has the unique power to be able to transform lives and TU Dance exists to ensure that all people, regardless of socioeconomic background, have the opportunity to experience this transformative power.”

Watching a TU Dance concert is an emotional experience. Sands’ choreography, while technically complex, is simply beautiful. As he explains, “Inspiration for new works or creations often comes from random and simple everyday experiences. Music for certain conjures ideas, but I’ve found for me, that more often it’s the random daily happenings, like seeing a cavalcade of leaves being blown by an autumn wind, that spurs the ideas for new works.” TU is currently preparing for upcoming performances at the Cowles Center, the culminating concert of their 12th season.

URI SANDS

photo by Brandon Stengel





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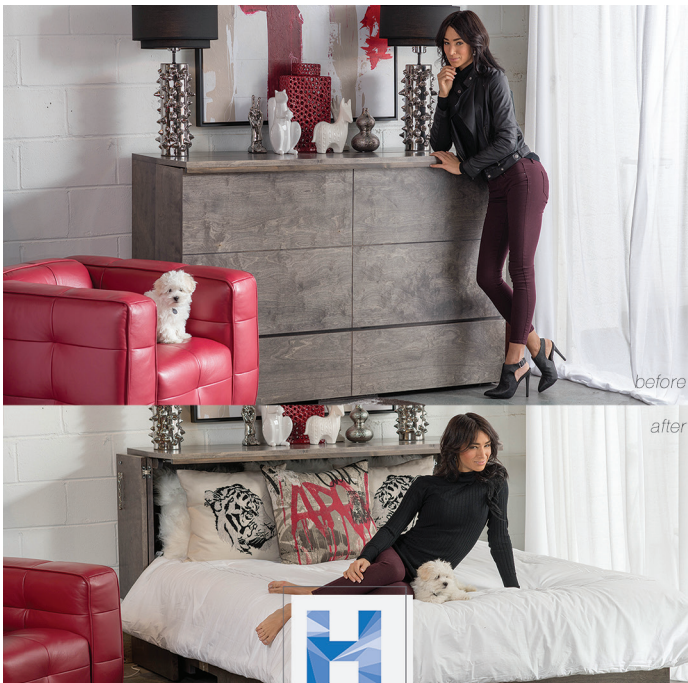
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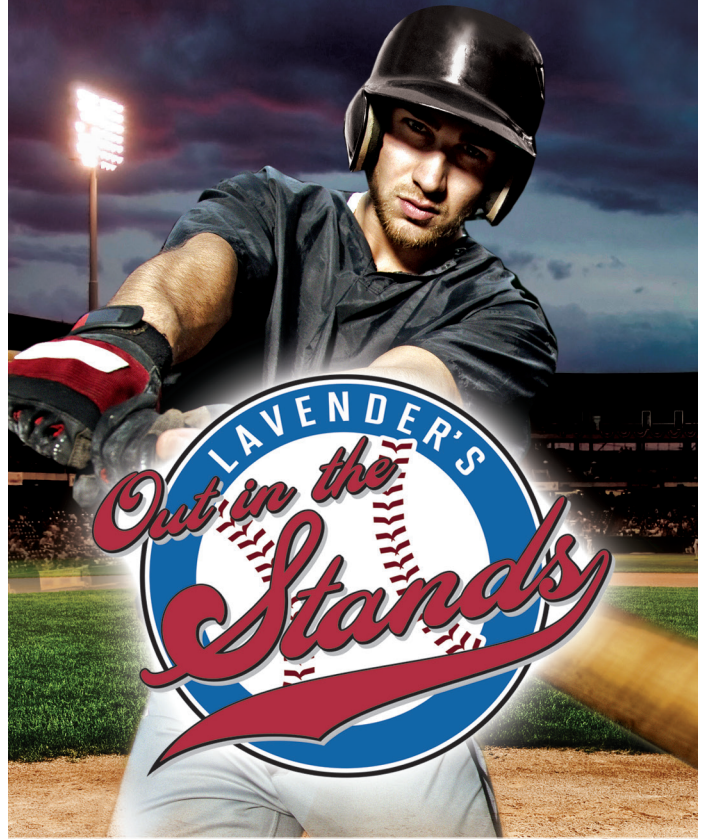
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Mind and Body: Taja Will

Taja Will

Year Founded: 2008

www.tajawill.com

"My work insists on a personal relationship with the material, dancer-choreographer co-creation of movement vocabulary and an aesthetic of spontaneity. Improvisation has been my core training and exists at the heart of my process." For Taja Will, this creative process often begins conceptually. She may start with an idea, question, or mind map, before moving on to an embodied response. The majority of Will's dancer/collaborators have been those that strike her immediate attraction based on the way they are able to speak about their love for the art. She admires those that are driven to ask questions and aims to create an ensemble built on a strong sense of individuality. "My dancers are my chosen family, we talk a lot about love and support. In the center of my work are always, always deeply rooted relationships."

When starting out, she took full advantage of a lot of the open forum opportunities for new choreographers to show work. Will expresses great gratitude toward the Red Eye Theater and their New Works 4 Weeks program. "I was first selected for the Works-In-Progress program in 2010, when I was in the process of becoming acquainted with my artistic voice."

It was through the feedback structures in this program that she felt herself settle into the beginning of her signature aesthetic. "There are so many great platforms here, 9x22 Dance Lab, the open cabarets at Patrick's and the audition process for the Walker Art Center Choreographer's Evening, plus so many more." To other aspiring choreographers she expresses that you should not be afraid to advocate for yourself. Simply anything can happen.

In the year to come, Taja Will is extremely excited about the diversity of projects that she is working on. Will is currently a collaborative director with Aniccha Arts on *Census*, a large-scale, interdisciplinary work premiering June 11 at the Northern Spark Festival. She is also collaborating on *A Hill in Natchez*, a surrealist interdisciplinary performance premiering at the Southern Theater in July.



TAJA WILL

photo by Sean Smuda

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DJ LATINIDAD'S LATINO DANCE PARTY

Mixed Blood Theatre
www.mixedblood.com
Through March 26

A range of stories from award-winning Latino playwrights, choreographers, DJs, composers, novelists, and comedians — Dominican, Cuban, Mexican, Chilean, Colombian, Chicano, Nuyorican, and Sotarian — molded into a theatrical event by conceiver/director Mark Valdez.

RESTAURANT PAIRING: CHIMBORAZO

www.chimborazorestaurant.com
A small, understated restaurant on Central Avenue in Minneapolis serves up some amazing Ecuadorean food. The sopas, the yuca frita, the hornado con papas of roast pork with llapingachos, mote, and tomato-onion curtido are all on the top of my to-order list. Even better if there's a night of dancing and stories to follow. Add a little Ecuadorean to a night filled with Dominican, Cuban, Mexican, Chilean, Colombian, Chicano, Nuyorican, and Sotarian.

NINA SIMONE: FOUR WOMEN

Park Square Theatre's Andy Boss Thrust Stage
www.parksquaretheatre.org
Through March 26

The political transformation of singer and songwriter Nina Simone has been shaped into a new play by Christina Ham, with music. Preeminent musical theater icon Regina Marie Williams plays Simone. She sings "I Put a Spell on You," "Feelin' Good," and the protest song "Four Women," among others.

Photo by Tom Wallace

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Photo by Scott Suchman

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

The Jungle Theater
www.jungletheater.com
 Through March 27

Among the best ever all-female crossgender casts in Twin Cities theater history. The Jungle's new artistic director, Sarah Rasmussen, has staged a look into male rivalry that thrills and delights with some delicious male turns by Christiana Clark, Mo Perry, and Sha Cage. Packed with gorgeous design elements!

RESTAURANT PAIRING: SCENA TAVERN

www.scenatavern.com

While the set of the play, with its bold pink and tree-centric stage, reminds me of the nearby-but-no-longer Heidi's 2.0, the Italian story tells me to go to the new Scena Tavern in Uptown. Get some drinks crafted with Bittercube bitters and have that mouth-watering meatball and the pappardelle with veal tongue Bolognese as you consider climbing to the second floor of this eatery like Christiana Clark flawlessly does in the show. It's all about Italian with a side of braggadoccio.

THE CRITIC/THE REAL INSPECTOR HOUND

Guthrie Theater's McGuire Proscenium Stage
www.guthrietheater.org
 Through March 27

Richard Brinsley Sheridan's nasty 18th century spoof on critics, *The Critic*, adapted by Jeffrey Hatcher, is wonderfully contrasted with Tom Stoppard's highly imaginative spoof on critics, *The Real Inspector Hound*. Michael Kahn has directed these two gems

to deliriously and deliciously funny effect. All performances are spot on!

THE DUTCHMAN AND THE OWL ANSWERS

Penumbra Theatre Company
www.penumbraetheatre.org
 Through March 27

Two classic African American plays from the mid-1960s provide a great opportunity to see two groundbreakers that helped form the discourse on race and racism. Amira Baraka's *The Dutchman* penetrates the sexual tensions of an interracial hetero relationship. Adrienne Kennedy's *The Owl Answers* examines issues around interracial family history.

COUNTRY ROADS: THE MUSIC OF JOHN DENVER

Plymouth Playhouse
www.plymouthplayhouse.com
 Through May 1

John Denver was a songwriter and singer who was country by definition but his work was so poetic and wistful that it had cross-over appeal like few artists ever. Dennis Curley as the headliner and a six-piece band deliver favorites like "Rocky Mountain High" and "Take Me Home, Country Roads."

RESTAURANT PAIRING: THE SHERIDAN ROOM

www.thesheridanroom.com

In this comfort-food paradise in Northeast Minneapolis, they only spin vinyl. And I can imagine eating my beer can chicken and crooning "Take Me Home, Country Roads" from a table in the back of this gem of a new eatery. The first time I ever ate at The Sheridan Room, I swooned over the grilled cheese

sandwich made with my favorite cheese, Prairie Breeze, with apples and the perfect smudge of squash. As said by John Denver, it "fills up my senses."

BLITHE SPIRIT

Old Log Theater
www.oldlog.com
 Through May 28

This is perhaps iconic gay comic playwright Noel Coward's most popular, and certainly his most imaginative, play. A séance is held for the ghost of a man's dead wife. Katherine Ferrand plays the dotty mystic, Madame Arcati. We wonder if ghosts actually do exist and if we can truly summon them!

THE WORKING DEAD

Brave New Workshop
www.bravenewworkshop.com
 Through June 11

This hilarious new revue is a fresh take on today's workplace. The micro-aggressions of protocols and procedures at work in this high-tech-crazy culture we have evolved into make for unique comic choices. Performed by the region's premier comedy theater. For over 50 years they've been on the sociopolitical cutting edge!

BEAUTY & THE BEAST

Chanhassen Dinner Theatres
www.chanhassendt.com
 Through Sept. 3

Standards of beauty are rigorously questioned in the beloved Disney musical based on the beloved Disney film. An enchantress turns a handsome prince into an ugly beast. A young woman named Belle is seen as odd, rather than the beauty she really is. Complete with a walking, talking clock and candlestick!

A 24-DECADE HISTORY OF POPULAR MUSIC: THE 20TH CENTURY ABRIDGED

Guthrie Theater's Wurtele Thrust Stage
www.guthrietheater.org
 March 18-19

Taylor Mac travels from Tin Pan Alley to rock 'n' roll with a five-piece band to present 240 years of music. Mac is one for pushing the boundaries. From the daringly satirical *Hir* to this 24-decade history, Mac is a rigorous challenger of general assumptions about gender.

LOVE PERSON

Park Square Theatre's Proscenium Stage
www.parksquaretheatre.org
 March 18-April 10

The mysteries of bilingual relationships are explored in this new incarnation of Aditi Kapil's play which first premiered at Mixed Blood in 2008. Since then, it won the Stavis Playwriting Award and has been widely produced. Sexual orientation, technology, and differently abled issues are part of the whole picture.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34 ➔

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THE SECRET GARDEN

Theatre in the Round

www.theatreintheround.org

March 18–April 17

Sylvia Ashby's adaptation of the Frances Hodgson Burnett children's classic is a proverbial child's mystery and adventure story. When Mary Lennox explores a gloomy old estate she finds a garden that has been locked up for a very long time. Ashby adapted last TRP season's popular *Anne of Green Gables*.

RESTAURANT PAIRING: MARIN RESTAURANT & BAR

www.marinrestaurant.com

There's something about the stately interior of Marin and the somewhat hidden patio just along Hennepin Avenue that reminds me of the wonderful show, *The Secret Garden*. I can see a kid sneaking around the library in the lower level, but maybe not stopping for a drink like I'd recommend you do. The way our weather's been warming up lately, by the time the performance opens, perhaps you can consider dining al fresco in the courtyard before the show? Take a hint from the story: live a little.

WATERMELON HILL

History Theatre

www.historytheatre.com

March 19–April 10

We are hearing more about unwed pregnant mothers giving up their babies to adoption under the influence of the Catholic Church. History Theatre reflects on a local account of such a story from 1965. The young females were given a new name and strict instructions for secrecy.

AN ADULT EVENING OF SHEL SILVERSTEIN AND TABLE 12: A PLAY AT A WEDDING

Freshwater Theatre Company

at Phoenix Theater

www.freshwatertheatre.com

March 19–April 3

An Adult Evening of Shel Silverstein kicks off the evening, under the direction of Ariel Leaf, revisiting the darkly comic adult world of poet Shel Silverstein, where nothing is as it seems and where the most innocent conversation can turn menacing in an instant. Then, we welcome you to Table 12. If you're seated here, the bride and groom would prefer to avoid you – and for good reason. Your waiter will be by with drinks, food...and restraining order.

ANIMAL DANCE

Children's Theatre Company

www.childrenstheatre.org

March 22–May 1

Preschoolers and adults can see choreographer and performance artist Ann Carlson

will have us stamp our hooves and clap our paws with animal friends. It's a quest for self-expression and understanding. Be very aware that although CTC shows are made for children, adults are apt to find it's some of the best theater around for any age.

ODORI-BA – DANCING PLACES

Nenkin Butoh Dan

at The Southern Theater

www.southerntheater.org

March 23–25

Three different locations in the Southern Theater and three simultaneous performances will feature Nenkin Butoh Dan (Masanari Kawahara, Dustin Maxwell, and Gadu). The performances will not be repeated twice in the same space. A sign that the Southern is a great place to go for the unconventional.

RESTAURANT PAIRING: ZEN BOX IZAKAYA

Japanese dance theater pairs well with Japanese food theater. From the moment I'm greeted while coming through the door of Zen Box Izakaya until the moment I leave with a similar verbal departure, I feel like I'm a part of a flavorful food production. Go with a group, order at least eight dishes, and enjoy the show.

www.zenboxizakaya.com

CORIOLANUS & THE NORMAL HEART

New Epic Theater

at The Lab Theater

www.newepictheater.org

March 24–April 16

New Epic Theater runs Shakespeare's tragedy about a Roman general and his domineering mother in repertory with Larry Kramer's groundbreaking play about the rise of AIDS. The same cast of eight local actors will perform the plays. Featuring Torsten Johnson (*Colossal*, *One Arm*) and Guthrie veteran Michelle O'Neill.

JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT

Hennepin Theatre Trust

at Orpheum Theatre

www.hennepintheatrettrust.org

March 29–April 3

It's perhaps Tim Rice & Andrew Lloyd Webber's lightest musical, but *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* never loses its following. This production is directed and choreographed by Tony Award-winner Andy Blankenbuehler. The biblical story of Joseph and the coat of many colors includes the tunes "Any Dream Will Do" and "Close Every Door."

A NIGHT WITH JANIS JOPLIN

Ordway Center for the Performing Arts

www.ordway.org

March 29–April 3

Polarizing singer Janis Joplin haunts us to this very day. Her distinct voice and her music

Animal
Dance



Photo by Dan Norman

style that ranged from the melodic to vocal extremes came to an untimely death in 1970 of a heroin overdose. Influenced by rhythm and blues and the Beat scene, she rebelled against her restrictive Texas upbringing.

C.

Theater Latté Da

at The Ritz Theater

www.theaterlatteda.com

March 30–April 24

Bradley Greenwald and Robert Elhai's new musical adaptation of Edmond Rostand's classic play, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, is the definitive story of yearning to be loved by someone we think could not love us. Latté Da has been producing some terrific new musicals!

BUYER AND CELLAR

Hennepin Theatre Trust

at New Century Theatre

www.hennepintheatrettrust.org

March 31–April 24

Charismatic Sasha Andreev exposes the cult of Barbra Streisand in this strange and acclaimed one-person show that uses Babs's own pictorial book, *My Passion for Design*, as a satirical springboard. Andreev gets to run the basement mall in the diva's Malibu basement. ("Alright, Mr. DeMille, I'm Ready for My Close Up.")

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36 ➔

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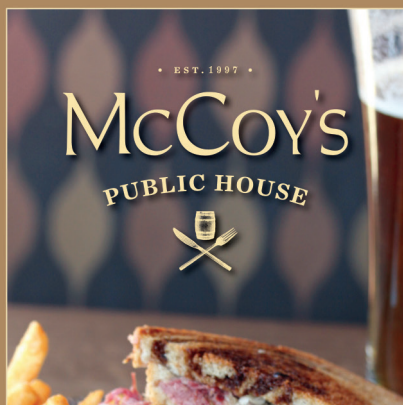


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CATCH ME IF YOU CAN

The Ames Center
www.ames-center.com
April 1-24

One of Steven Spielberg's lighter films became an even better stage musical. A teen-aged boy impersonates a doctor, a lawyer, a pilot, and forges checks big time. This impostor is pursued by the FBI. Based on a true story, going to show that fact can be stranger than fiction.

TWITCH

Mathew Janczewski's ARENA DANCES
at The Southern Theater
www.southerntheater.org
April 1-24

Mathew Janczewski's ARENA DANCES is celebrating its 20-year history. *Twitch* features selected works from the company's repertoire and world premiere quartet, *Picturing That Day*, inspired by the artwork of Jim Hodges and the music of Irving Berlin.

CHEER UP GARY

Four Humors
at The Southern Theater
www.southerntheater.org
April 8-22

What if cheering up people was turned into a business? The Ultimate CheerUp packages from Four Humors may be just what you need. You'll get lots of interesting options at the Southern Theater when you choose to be cheered up by the wild folks from Four Humors.

VIOLET

Yellow Tree Theatre
www.yellowtreetheatre.com
April 8-May 8

Violet has become a classic and is being produced by a small theater company with an impressive track record with musicals. A woman with a disfigured face in the 1960s looks for a miracle. She hops a Greyhound for Oklahoma to meet a televangelist she believes will provide that.

HARVEY

Guthrie Theater's Wurtele
Thrust Stage
www.guthrietheater.org
April 9-May 15

The 1945 Pulitzer Prize for Drama went to Mary Chase for her hilariously imaginative tale of a six-foot-tall rabbit named Harvey. Here's a bona fide classic written by a woman that has never gotten the full respect it deserves. Harvey's human friend, Elwood, threatens his stuffy family's reputation and his sister tries to commit him!



Photo by Matthew Murphy

RESTAURANT PAIRING: THE RABBIT HOLE

www.eatdrinkrabbit.com
This pairing was a gimme. A production with plenty of whimsy requires a meal of the same flair. This delightfully designed restaurant in Midtown Global Market serves up Koreatown-style dishes with names as funny as a six-foot-tall rabbit, like the Bop Bowls and The Harold and Kumar Poutine. Don't forget an order of the Van Damme Good Brussels. They're damn good.

DIARY OF A WIMPY KID THE MUSICAL – PREMIERE

Children's Theatre Company
www.childrenstheatre.org
April 12-June 5

A boy named Greg Heffley is structurally at odds with the environment he lives in. Jeff



Photo by Woodford Sisters Photography

Kinney's book series has been adapted into a new musical and is produced in special arrangement with Fox Stage Productions and former Ordway president and *Rent* producer, Kevin McCollom. It's great to see the plight of boys put on stage!

BULLETS OVER BROADWAY

Ordway Center for the Performing Arts
www.ordway.org
April 12-17

The classic Woody Allen film comedy tells of a young playwright in need of financial backing for his next show. As you might expect, it's New York and the mob and a showgirl figure into it. Its director and choreographer are of Tony fame: Susan Stroman. A stellar example of a wonderful film becoming a wonderful stage work!

SUNSET BABY

Penumbra Theatre
www.penumbraetheatre.org
April 12-May 8

The disintegration of idealism is portrayed as two people face the unimaginable: their dreams of revolution being undone from within by drugs and conspiracy, as well as brutalization in the streets. Penumbra is America's flagship African American theater. Where do these drugs come from? Who or what originates these conspiracies, real or not?

EARTHQUAKES IN LONDON

Guthrie Theater's Dowling Studio
www.guthrietheater.org
April 13-April 24

Three daughters struggle with their father's apocalyptic view of the world's not-too-distant future in Mark Bartlett's epic play that spans from 1968 to 2525. Presented by the U of M/Guthrie Theater B.F.A. Actor Training Program senior class of 2016. A perfect play for our time when so many doomsayers are so worried!

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Artistry
Schneider Theater, Bloomington Center for the Arts
www.artistrymn.org
April 14-May 8

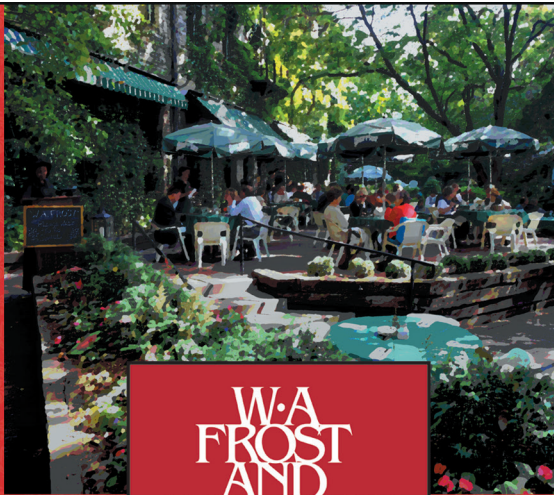
The final years of Tsarist Russia and the poverty and oppression of its Jewish denizens is one of the greatest Broadway musicals. Bask in such splendid tunes as "If I Were A Rich Man," "Anatevka," and "Sunrise, Sunset." Few musicals address the problem of change as we go through life as poignantly as *Fiddler*.

CONSTELLATIONS

The Jungle Theater
www.jungletheater.com
April 15-May 29

The theories of relativity and quantum mechanics play into this acclaimed look into romance between two people. It is also the play that made Jake Gyllenhaal a bona fide stage star and not just a movie superstar. In Minneapolis, Ron Menzel and Anna Sundberg star in the local premiere!

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38 ➔



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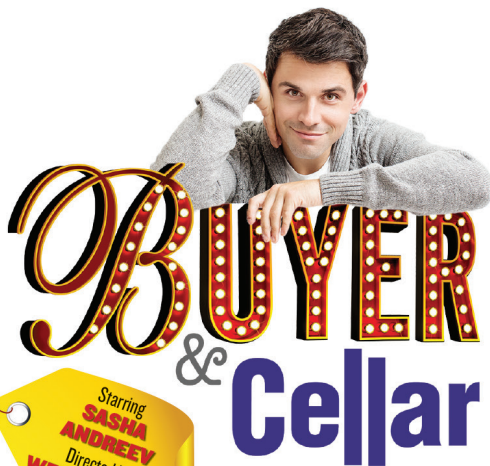


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SPRING ARTS & DINING

LASSO OF TRUTH

Walking Shadow Theatre Company
at Playwrights' Center

www.walkingshadowcompany.org

April 15–May 1

William Marston, inventor of the lie-detector machine, created the preeminent female superhero, Wonder Woman. This play features the two women Marston lived with in a polyamorous relationship. Both women inspired the superhero. Polyamory is one of those taboo topics that seems to finally be getting airing!

SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR

Park Square Theatre's Andy Boss
Thrust Stage

www.parksquaretheatre.org

April 19–May 8

Imagine a group of people who claim to have sprung from the imagination of an author. They invade in the form of a mysterious, uninvited family on the set of *The Maze*, a reality TV show reminiscent of Orwell's Big Brother. Director/writer Alan Berks brilliantly comments on social reality and celebrity.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

Ballet Minnesota

at The O'Shaughnessy at St. Catherine University

www.oshag.stkate.edu

April 22–23

Only the kiss of a handsome prince can awaken her. Little fairies watch over and all of our fantasies about true love and happily ever after are manifested in this enchanted timeless tale. St. Catherine University's O'Shaughnessy Auditorium has become a serious destination for dance.

BAND IT, CHOPIN STUDIES, AND EXCERPTS FROM SEASONS

James Sewell Ballet

at The Cowles Center for Dance & the Performing Arts

www.jsballet.org

April 22–May 1

American band music, Nashville Ballet Artistic Director Paul Vasterling's *Seasons*, and a reprise of Sewell's *Chopin Studies* with live piano accompaniment by Tadeusz Majewski. JSB has evolved into a preeminent ballet company, perhaps the region's best. They blur the categories between classicism, contemporary, and camp in a masterful way.

CHARM

Mixed Blood Theatre

www.mixedblood.com

April 22–May 8

Mama Darleena is an African American trans



Photo by Rich Ryan

woman in her 60s teaching an etiquette class to trans youth experiencing homelessness in Chicago. Her students include a Latina trans woman, a cisgender couple, a local gang member, and a gay suburban teen. They all struggle with each other and their circumstances.

WHO HAS EYES TO SEE

Uprising Theatre Company

at Andrew Riverside Presbyterian Church

www.uprisingtheatreco.com

April 29–May 7

Shannon T.L. Kearns has written and will play the lead character, Jamie, in a story of a transgender man who is called home by his mother because his sister is in trouble. Being back in touch with his mother and his wife, Jamie sees that life has changed drastically.

LEAP OF FAITH

Minneapolis Musical Theatre

at New Century Theatre

www.hennepintheatretrust.org

April 29–May 22

When the "Reverend" Jonas Nightingale's bus breaks down in a small Kansas town, he works his traveling ministry mystification on the gullible in a revival tent. However, he meets with resistance from the sheriff and a local woman who see him as dishonest. Based on the '90s Steve Martin movie hit.

RESTAURANT PAIRING: REVIVAL

www.revivalmpls.com

Unlike the show about a poser faith-healer, there's nothing huckster about this joint. The fried chicken is the real deal and the burger is just as soul-saving. As in *Leap of Faith*, you'll find yourself yelling "One more!" as you ponder your future and well-being. Simply put, if you don't already have it, you will find religion at Revival. Now, if we could just get Steve Martin to Minneapolis to serve us some hush puppies, it'd be perfect.

KID SIMPLE: A RADIO PLAY IN THE FLESH

Swandive Theatre

at The Southern Theater

www.southerntheater.org

April 29–May 22

A girl invents a machine for hearing sounds that cannot be heard. When the machine is stolen, she teams up with the last boy virgin in the eleventh grade and discovers a fantastical realm where sound is not what we have been made to think it is.

THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES

Theatre in the Round

www.theatreintheround.org

April 29–May 22

John Guare's comedy probes the foibles of a family in Sunnyside, Queens. Artie dreams of writing songs for Hollywood and loathes his wife. The Pope is coming to Yankee Stadium. Their manic son is AWOL from the army. One of the great American plays of the 1960s.

COMPLICATED FUN

History Theatre

www.historytheatre.com

April 30–May 29

Ever wonder how Minneapolis became such a mecca for underground music? Explore the world of First Avenue and the '80s scene: the Replacements, the Suicide Commandos, Hüsker Dü, Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis, and of course, The Suburbs. The era of Ronald Reagan and Rubik's cubes is reflected in remembrance of alternative music.

BIG PANTS & BOTOX

Plymouth Playhouse

www.plymouthplayhouse.com

May 5–Aug. 14

Turning 50 can be a traumatic event for many of us. Kimberly Richards of *Late Nite Catechism* fame plays in this comedy by *Girls Night* author, Louis Roche. Aging need not be something dreadful. Maybe the less serious we take it, the more we explore the lighter side of it.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40 ➔



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SPRING ARTS & DINING

The Book
of
Mormon



Photo by Joan Marcus

CINDERELLA 1944: A LOVE STORY

Ames Center's Black Box Theatre
www.ames-center.com
May 6–8

The timeless fairy tale is reimagined in England during World War II when the Nazis were trying to bomb the country to Kingdom Come. Twin Cities Ballet artistic director Denise Vogt interviewed her English relatives about their experiences of that dreadful time as background.

THE SPARROW

Live Action Set
at The Southern Theater
www.southerntheater.org
May 6–20

There is a cycle to life and to all things in life. A crew of sailors see the arrival of a sparrow as the end of their long journey. The inventively physical Live Action Set celebrates these cycles with an emphasis on life's joyous possibilities as they blur the edges of genre definitions.

TROUBLE IN MIND

Guthrie Theater's McGuire Proscenium Stage
www.guthrietheater.org
May 7–June 5

Before Lorraine Hansberry, there was Alice Childress (1916–1994), one of the towering African American playwrights. That the Guthrie is finally producing one of her plays should be shouted from the mountaintops! Set in New York, 1957, as rehearsals begin for a racially integrated production.

THE SHINING

Minnesota Opera
at Ordway Center for the Performing Arts
www.mnopera.org
May 7–15

Stephen King's iconic novel becomes an opera by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Paul Moravec and librettist Mark Campbell (*Silent Night*, *The Manchurian Candidate*). Campbell is in a class by himself as an opera script writer who has an utterly visionary sense of turning great novels (and films) into operatic powerhouses.

RESTAURANT PAIRING: THE COMMODORE

www.thecommodorebar.com

The reborn sparkling gem of Cathedral Hill in St. Paul, The Commodore, gets me in the mood for an operatic, downward spiral story. I wouldn't mind losing my mind as I wonder if I'm really talking to the bartender at one of The Commodore's glorious art deco bars, or if it's a ghost from the past when Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald used to reside in one of the

apartments above. The liquors are bootleg-distance local and the food is delectable. Watch for the trick hallway, though. While there aren't any ghostly twins to be seen, there's a mirror that might make for a rough night.

THE BOOK OF MORMON

Hennepin Theatre Trust
at Orpheum Theatre
www.hennepintheatretrust.org
May 10–29

This mischievous musical captures the sardonically snarky world of post-9/11 resignation. Nothing is sacred, from the Mormon Church to Ugandan AIDS sufferers. Creator Trey Parker wants us to stop being so serious and have a laugh. A seriously successful musical, to be sure.

2016 Q-STAGE: NEW WORKS SERIES

20% Theatre Company Twin Cities
at Intermedia Arts
www.tctwentypercent.org
May 12–22

Four experimental new works from local queer artists. This experimental series supports local, queer artists and performance-makers who need a stage and resources to further develop and share new work for each other and a public audience. Selected artists engage in a six-month development process.

THE INGENIOUS GENTLEMAN DON QUIXOTE OF LA MANCHA

Guthrie Theater's Dowling Studio
www.guthrietheater.org
May 13–22

The Four Humors group takes the Don Quixote archetype, putting the artist and the actor

into a collaboration of sorts, to create a new reality, or is it an illusion of reality? What if you can't leave that "unreal" world? Will the Man of La Mancha be able to continue in that world or not?

BLITHE SPIRIT

Artistry
Black Box Theater, Bloomington Center for the Arts
www.artistrymn.org
May 19–June 12

Gay master playwright Noel Coward's zany look at an English novelist who invites a medium to hold a séance, reels in the laughs when the ghost of his temperamental first wife decides to haunt the house. A humorous look at what, for many, is a scary subject. That's Coward for you!

QUEENS

Sandbox Theatre
Park Square Theatre's Andy Boss Thrust Stage
www.parksquaretheatre.org
May 19–June 4

The time is the early 1900s, a generation after the Civil War, and an aging African American boxer is preparing for his final fight. Jim Crow America is new territory for the inventive Sandbox Theatre; an eagerly awaited production.

SONS OF THE PROPHET

Park Square Theatre's Proscenium Stage
www.parksquaretheatre.org
May 20–June 5

Stephen Karam's Pulitzer Prize-finalist play looks into the lives of a family whose roots are in Lebanon and now live in the U.S. Family issues, the problem of chronic pain, and insurance make this very much a play of our time. Sasha Andreev plays the gay protagonist in a production directed by Jef Hall-Flavin.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42 ➔

Photo by Eric Melzer

The Sparrow



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—*The New York Times*

Please note: the Minnesota Orchestra does not perform on this program



PINK MARTINI with the Minnesota Orchestra

Apr 29-30

Sarah Hicks, conductor

Founded in Portland in 1994, this ensemble clicks on pop favorites like *Dream A Little Dream of Me* and *Que Sera, Sera* as well as their own delightfully quirky originals—a perfect match with the Minnesota Orchestra.

minnesotaorchestra.org
612.371.5656 / Orchestra Hall

PHOTO Pink Martini: Holly Andres

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SPRING ARTS & DINING

THE CHRISTIANS

Walking Shadow Theatre Company
at **Mixed Blood Theatre**
www.walkingshadowcompany.org
May 20–June 11

Lucas Hnath's play looks into a church in which an announcement by its pastor changes the very identity of how the congregation regards itself. The dramatic structure is of a live sermon. In recent years, American theater has done much to redefine how we think of Christianity.

SCAPEGOAT

Pillsbury House + Theatre
www.pillsburyhouseandtheatre.org
May 27–June 26

The place is Elaine, Arkansas, 1919. Black sharecroppers Effie and Virgil are trying to organize for better wages but are violently thwarted by white residents. This leads to one of the biggest race riots in U.S. history. Written by the accomplished Christina Ham. Part two muses on the effects of this in the future.

BURIED CHILD

Red Bird Theatre
at **The Southern Theater**
www.southerntheater.org
May 27–June 19

Buried Child looms to this day, in the eyes of many, as Sam Shepard's greatest play. Director Genevieve Bennett is a fine choice to direct this examination of a Midwestern family's violent dysfunction, chronic secrecy, and a son who comes to break the negative cycle.

MACBETH

Chameleon Theatre Circle
Black Box Theatre at the Ames Center
www.ames-center.com
June 3–12

Chameleon Theatre Circle stages Shakespeare's darkest tragedy, revealing what can happen when ambition is put into motion by merciless bloodletting. A royal couple personifies a sick relationship wherein each brings out the worst in the other. So how can they stop the horrific momentum they've launched?

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Theatre in the Round
www.theatreintheround.org
June 3–26

No one has examined the subtleties of the female/male relationship like the great Jane Austen. Almost two centuries after her time when she had to hide her manuscripts because she was a woman, it's bittersweet to know that her novels have been adapted regularly into plays. Here we see two sisters and their opportunities for marriage.

RESTAURANT PAIRING: BETTY DANGER'S COUNTRY CLUB

www.bettydangers.com

Have you seen *Austenland*? You really need to. It's about how we love to live in the era of Jane Austen, but how life just isn't made to be that way today. So, as homage to then with an update for now, I recommend heading over to Betty Danger's Country Club before *Sense and Sensibility* to see how propriety can be flipped on its ear when pomp and circumstance have gone amok, ladies first. The food is fantastic, the drinks are frilly, and the ferris wheel is anything but sense and sensibility.

BALLAD OF THE PALE FISHERMAN

Transatlantic Love Affair
at **The Southern Theater**
www.southerntheater.org
June 3–July 17

One of the region's best physical theaters reprises one of its best productions. A woman who happens to be a seal falls in love with a fisherman and must choose between land and sea. Song, movement, multiple role playing, and dreamy transitions make this an ideal small-scale production.

MILLION DOLLAR QUARTET

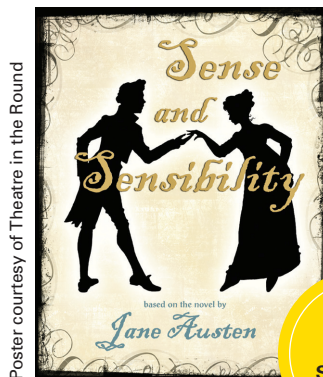
Old Log Theater
www.oldlog.com
June 10, 2016–Jan. 21, 2017

How can you go wrong with the reenactment of four legendary rock 'n' rollers in a storefront studio in Memphis, 1956? Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Elvis Presley mix it up in the one and only time these four icons-to-be played together. A rock jam session for the ages.

ORPHEUS UNSUNG

Guthrie Theater's Dowling Studio
www.guthrietheater.org
June 16–18

This you don't want to miss! This world premiere production will feature S? Percussion's Jason Treuting and musicians of The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Kaleidoscopic cinematic imagery and dance shape this "opera without words." Grammy Award-winning composer Steven Mackey in collaboration with percussionist/composer Treuting.



Poster courtesy of Theatre in the Round

Sense
And
Sensibility

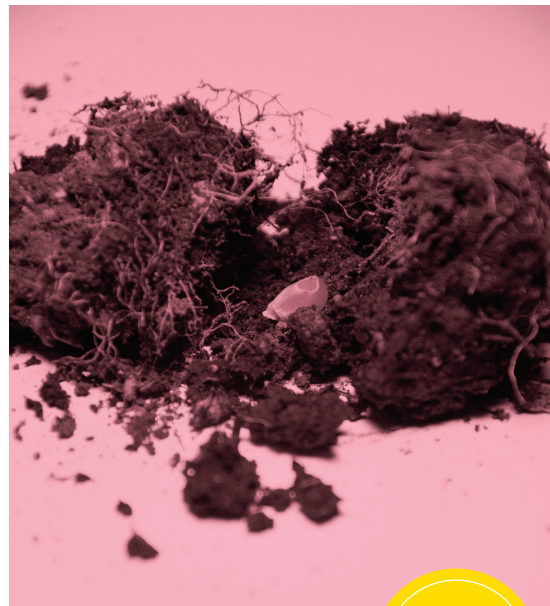


Photo courtesy of The Southern Theater

Buried
Child

TOT: THE UNTOLD, YET SPECTACULAR STORY OF (A FILIPINO) HULK HOGAN

Mu Performing Arts
at **Park Square Theater**
www.muperformingarts.org
June 16–26

An immigrant boy travels from the oppressive Ferdinand Marcos-ruled Philippines to the San Francisco Bay Area to meet his long-lost parents. From the profound difficulties of military rule to profound loneliness in the U.S., his subconscious conjures a pro-wrestling fantasy to escape into.

CALENDAR GIRLS

Park Square Theatre's Proscenium Stage
www.parksquaretheatre.org
June 17–July 24

Raising funds for a charity compels a group of women to pose in the buff for a calendar behind flowers and cakes. While showing their outer beauty to the world they discover their own inner beauty. Out of this emerges a sense of vulnerability in unison with bonds of friendship.

LE SWITCH

The Jungle Theater
www.jungletheater.com
June 17–July 31

Playwright Philip Dawkins muses on what occurs when marriage equality reaches the U.S. When circumstances send David to Montreal, he falls in love with a florist unexpectedly. What happens when a gay man who has never been allowed to marry finds that he can? How does his self-image change?

SOUTH PACIFIC

Guthrie Theater's Wurtele Thrust Stage
www.guthrietheater.org
June 18–Aug. 28

New Guthrie Artistic Director Joe Haj is passionate about theater reaching across cultural barriers. He has astutely chosen the great Rodgers and Hammerstein musical that looks at two Americans in love, one with a European and one with a Polynesian. Its gorgeous tunes include "Bali Hai" and "Some Enchanted Evening."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44 ➔

PHOTO BY JOE DICKIE

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Van Morrison
Featuring Mick Sterling
April 1 - 2

SPRING ARTS & DINING

THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY

Hennepin Theatre Trust
at Orpheum Theatre
www.hennepintheatretrust.org
June 21-26

Speaking to our hopes for a second chance, an Iowa housewife and a photographer happen into an unexpected romance which shatters their self-perceptions. Based on the best-selling novel by Robert James Waller, it stands as a significant look at middle-aged love and the musical version won two Tony Awards.

THE JUNGLE BOOK

Old Log Theater
www.oldlog.com
June 21-August 12

A new adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's beloved children's novel imagines a lost boy raised by wolves in the Indian jungles. Befriended by a laid-back bear and protected by a regal panther, young Mowgli navigates his elemental way that doesn't rely on human connection, but with connection of animal nature.

THE BEGINNING OF THINGS

Dance and Other Behaviors
at The Southern Theater
www.southerntheater.org
June 23-26

Bold physicality and experimental narrative storytelling infuse the work of Dance and Other Behaviors. Those who also want something familiar, yet groundbreaking in its time, will be interested in a solo work inspired by the landmark feminist fiction narrative, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin. Another notable Southern dance opportunity.

THE LION KING

Hennepin Theatre Trust
at Orpheum Theatre
www.hennepintheatretrust.org
July 5-Aug. 7

See this great and inventive Disney musical, maybe the best Disney musical ever, in the

very theater where it was developed. Director Julie Taymor integrated masks, puppets, beguiling visuals, and profound and funny animal characterizations drawn from the enormously popular movie. But it's better than the movie!

JEEVES INTERVENES

Theatre in the Round
www.theatreintheround.org
July 8-31

The archetype of the valet/butler was penned by P.G. Wodehouse. Jeeves is the very picture of smoothness and sophistication as he stands by his idle employer and friend, play-boy Bertie. Where would those rich folks be if their underlings didn't look out for them?

A HILL IN NATCHEZ

Joseph Horton
at The Southern Theater
www.southerntheater.org
July 14-17

A scenic hill turns into a bizarre bazaar where humans are sold. Music, visuals, and dance tell of a man and a woman caught up in it all. A comment on the New World where new symbols evolve that reflect violence, seduction, and laws asserted by a dubious new power structure.

DISGRACED

Guthrie Theater's McGuire
Proscenium Stage
www.guthrietheater.org
July 16-Aug. 28

Winner of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and nominated for the 2015 Tony Award for Best Play, playwright Ayad Akhtar gives us a dramatic New York dinner party through which issues of material success, religion, art, and allegiances are thrashed out.

RESTAURANT PAIRING: EASTSIDE

www.eastsidempls.com

Because it's near the Guthrie, is called Eastside, and screams "dinner party" for lovers of art and the finer things, I choose this restaurant for *Disgraced*. Not because it's a disgrace in any way, but I can honestly see myself yelling across a table or flinging a Campari-red drink at a friend while the

spicy chicken sandwich heats me up from the inside-out. Eastside looks calm, cool, and collected, but its food gives way to a more passionate buildup.

FIRST NIGHTS OF A FOOT FLIGHT!

Eclectic Edge Ensemble
at The Southern Theater
www.southerntheater.org
July 21-24

Eclectic Edge Ensemble and Artistic Director Karis Sloss give us an evening of jazz dance. It will probably make you want to move! Newly composed music, concert works by Sloss, guest choreographers, not to mention sneak peek moments from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a future full-length work.

A BOY AND HIS SOUL

Guthrie Theater's Dowling Studio
www.guthrietheater.org
Aug. 9-28

OBIE and Lucille Lortel Award and Tony-nominee Colman Domingo shares his acclaimed performance about coming of age as an African American in Philadelphia in the 1970s and '80s. This show played to rave reviews at New York's Vineyard Theatre. An example of the Guthrie's diverse style in its new era.

RHYTHMICALLY SPEAKING 2016

Rhythmically Speaking
at The Southern Theater
www.southerntheater.org
Aug. 18-20

This annual showcase of choreographers inspired by jazz and rhythm features talent from the Twin Cities both emerging and established. It suits the Southern Theater in its rebirth as a significant center for innovative performance work. It also serves as a reminder that the Twin Cities has a thriving jazz scene.

600 YEARS

Sandbox Theatre
at The Southern Theater
www.southerntheater.org
Aug. 26-Sept. 18

What if original sin were debatable and it was finally clarified that people are basically good? Imagine six centuries from now when murder and deceit no longer exist and women take extraordinary risks and face unprecedented danger to save humanity from extinction. Watch Sandbox employ its signature physical style.

BARS AND MEASURES

The Jungle Theater
www.jungletheater.com
Aug. 26-Oct. 9

A universal problem: whether those things that divide us can either drive us apart or lead to reconciliation. Imagine two brothers. Classical music versus jazz. Christian versus Muslim. Living free or behind bars. This stands as one of the fine examples of Jungle Theater producing major new plays. ■

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Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2016 "Hello From the Outside"

The Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2016 title was awarded to Emerson Kellogg on Saturday evening, Feb. 13, at The Saloon. At the time Kellogg was presented with the title sash he was wearing only a harness, a leather jock, and a pair of red patent leather spike-heeled pumps (and "jungle red" fingernails that matched the pumps).

Kellogg had plenty of company in the heels department: one other contestant, at least one other judge, two Saturday-afternoon discussion panel members, and both emcees sported high heels at some point during the weekend.

In this and so many other ways, this year's Twin Cities Leather weekend, held from Friday, Feb. 12 to Sunday, Feb. 14, was not your granddaddy's leather contest. And that's okay, or even better than okay. The weekend was a safe space for "outsiders among outsiders," which also happened to be the theme of one of the weekend's Kink U presentations.

In the Twin Cities and elsewhere, leather and kink culture is evolving to become a safe and accepting place for all ages, genders, orientations, ethnicities, and interests. Throughout the weekend, from Friday evening's Meet & Greet to Sunday's Victory Brunch, I saw shining examples of the collective energy, exhilaration, and sense of belonging and participation (and let's not forget fun) that this atmosphere and attitude can inspire.

Friday's Meet & Greet was about more than meeting the contestants and judges for the weekend. A raffle raised money for the Seville Fund, a scholarship program for GLBTQI young people affected by homelessness. Twin Cities Leather & Latte (TCL&L), the weekend's producers, unveiled their new retail branding scheme. And Stephen Patton, the outgoing Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2015, was given a step-aside sendoff by his fellow titleholders. They offered congratulations and benedictions, in person and via video, while masquerading as members of the esteemed, semi-secret Old Guard leather organization known as The Council of Elders.

Saturday afternoon's Kink U education events, presented by Titans of the Midwest, included classes on rope, flogging, and mind fucks, as well as the above-mentioned panel discussion titled "Sexuality and Desire: Being an Outsider Among Outsiders." Panelists dis-



Emerson Kellogg, Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2016.
Photo by Steve Lenius

cussed fetishes and kinks that are outside the community's mainstream, including "littles" (age play), "furies" (arousal by fur suits), and drag, heels, and corsets, as well as other kinds of gender nonconformity.

Saturday evening's contest featured some amazing fantasy presentations by the contestants. Justin Anderson demonstrated how to give a coffee enema (perhaps inspired by the "& Latte" portion of Twin Cities Leather & Latte). Steve Sinclair demonstrated how to do a leather makeover while lip-syncing to "Popular," sung

by Kristin Chenoweth, from the Broadway musical *Wicked*. (Showtunes! Yes!) Anthony Sivanthaphanith's fantasy showed him doing interesting things to someone dressed in a teddy bear suit (see "furries" mentioned above).

The most spectacular fantasy performance of the evening was Emerson Kellogg's adaptation of pop music megastar Adele's "Hello" video (which includes the lyrics "Hello from the outside"), complete with sunglasses, wind-blown blonde hair, and swirling autumn leaves. There was one change: the telephone booth in Adele's video was replaced by a glory hole.

Although the announcement of Emerson Kellogg as the new Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2016 was the climax of the weekend, there was still one more honor to bestow. At Sunday's Victory Brunch, the Robert Smith Community First Award was presented to John Bigger. The award recognized Bigger's "ongoing contributions to the Minnesota Leather Community."

Judges for the weekend were Kevin Murphy, Mr. Leather Ireland 2015 and first runner-up to International Mr. Leather 2015; Brian "Bolt" Donner, Mr. Tri-State Leather 2014 and second runner-up to International Mr. Leather 2015; Tim Hotchkin, International Leatherboy 2015; Jefferson Tugger, Mr. Phoenix Leather 2015; Trevor Black, Mr. San Francisco Leather 2015 (also known as drag artist Jem Jehova); Luckett Kiche, Ms Iowa Leather 2015; Greg Menzel, Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2014; and Andrew Bertke, chief judge and member of the Atons of Minneapolis.

The weekend's emcees were Karri Plowman and drag artist Camille Collins. Tallymaster was Michael Kramer. Bootblack for the weekend was Erick Joseph, Alaska State Bootblack, from Anchorage, Alaska. Weekend events were ASL signed by boy Woody, Great Lakes Leatherboy 2015.

As Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2016, Kellogg will represent Twin Cities Leather & Latte and Minnesota's leather community in the 38th annual International Mr. Leather competition (www.imrl.com), May 27–30, 2016 (Memorial Day weekend), in Chicago. ■

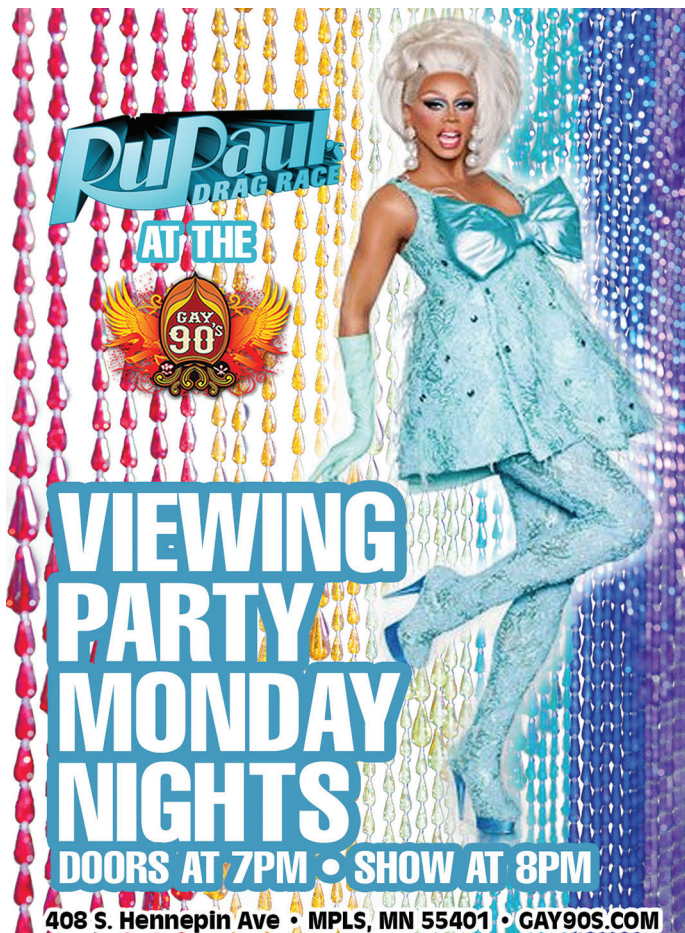
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2016 Lexus RX



What goes well with fine arts and dining? A fine luxury car!

We're exaggerating here, but there is a point being made. The luxury car market has seen its share of sales growth of crossovers and SUVs, along with mainstream brands. It is no surprise to find that the most popular SUV/crossover in the luxury market is the Lexus RX.

The RX practically invented the phylum of "luxury crossover." It came about in 1998 as an early 1999 model where Toyota took a car-based platform and crafted a two-row crossover for the Lexus brand. They emphasized not only a distinctive design and interior atmosphere, but a comfortable ride-handling mix expected from a Lexus. The result was not only its lead in sales volume, but earning the trust of its owners toward the highest loyalty level of any vehicle in its class. If you have a Lexus RX, it is almost expected that you will own another one.

For 2016, there is a new RX. It follows the same formula as its previous three versions: two rows of seating, a V6 engine with an available hybrid gas-electric driveline, available all-wheel drive, and spacious accommodations for everything (including a major shopping yield). You can also get an F Sport version for a more aggressive look and feel, now for both the regular V6 and Hybrid models.

There is more to this fourth generation RX. Much more!

You have already seen what Lexus has already done with the exterior by looking at these photos alone. It is a continuation of a design language now honed in on the smaller NX crossover. The spindle grille becomes a focal point for the entire front end. Everything else is shaped from that face. The headlamps are angled back while the lower side areas include integrated fog and driving lamps for better night vision and daytime visibility. Our RX 350 tester had the "standard" grille with a linear horizontal set of slats all the way down to the lower trim.

The lines flow rearward with many shapes to cheat the wind. Meanwhile, the roof offers a rakish windshield and the most controversial piece of the entire vehicle, the C Pillar. Lexus decided to make the rear area more dramatic by creating a "floating roof" motif with the glasshouse angled down to the beltline at the very end. There is a piece of

glass back there, smaller than any seen on prior RX versions.

The tailgate has a similarly raking shape for the glass, while offering a three-dimensional series of shapes to bring the taillight assembly outward and other visual effects for the license plate area and the bumper. Though it still stands tall, Lexus ensures us that they'll use the right size of wheels to finish each model's look. Our Luxury package model had nice 20-inch alloy wheels with large vent openings.

While the exterior offered the biggest dramatic change in the RX, it will be the interior that offers the biggest leap in improvement over previous generations. The biggest change is the shifter; while it used to be housed high on the console in a 45-degree angle, Lexus raised the console higher and placed a shorter shifter upright just like the rest of the brand's lineup. This is a huge, and welcomed, change.

The rest of the interior continues this huge and dramatic change. The instrument panel is now aligned with the latest Lexus models — a straight forward binnacle with large dials and a customizable TFT screen in the middle, along with a short center stack for the audio and climate controls. The infotainment screen is placed inside of a deep cowl with excellent eye contact position. It is now a tablet-like screen, with a standard eight-inch version, leading to an available 12.3-inch wide screen. Our version had the smaller screen, which worked very well. Although, Lexus' Remote Touch "mouse" still controls the functions on the screen. It is still one of the weakest spots on the RX, as the Remote Touch controller is pretty finicky, even when it has to complete a command on the screen. Lexus Enform drives a series of connected services using both Bluetooth and on-board mobile technologies, enabling a dial-in service to send destinations to the RX and an app suite that allows for certain phone apps to be utilized in the vehicle.

Five adults will enjoy loads of space in both rows. Front seats are sized well, but do not offer enough bolstering to lock front occupants in. There are power adjustments for the lumbar and thigh support, along with standard rake, recline, and high adjustments. Rear seat occupants enjoy good comfort with more than enough head and leg room for ev-



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everyone. The rear seatbacks do recline and the cushions also adjust for rake. In other words, it should be no problem for you to set a reservation for five at your favorite place to eat and grab five tickets to the theater — while riding along in luxury.

Cargo space starts with just 18.4 cubic feet with the retractable cover in place, yet is expandable to 56.3 cubic feet with the rear seat folded down. For that finishing touch, our Luxury package tester came with a lovely sapele wood finish inlaid between brushed aluminum trimmings. In all, the RX has one of the finest cabins in its class.

Lexus also did a lot of work underneath the hood. The 3.5-liter V6 may look the same as in previous generations; however, there is a significant and noticeable power increase than ever before. This engine is now rated at 295 horsepower and you can feel it! It also helps to have an all-new eight-speed automatic transmission connected to it. This combination exhibits a quicker and more flexible driveline with smooth moves in passing and in maintaining highway speed. This Luxury trim version had all-wheel drive, which offers a lockable differential to ensure maximum traction. Plus, there are selectable drive modes that actually affect throttle response and gearing. In terms of fuel consumption, the RX 350 averaged 19.5 MPG in our care.

One expects the RX to ride smoothly and handle competently. Further improvements were made to the suspension to enable a greater balance between a comfortable ride and competent cornering. The result is perhaps the core of why the RX is a leader in its class. It does everything well as advertised. Although, you will experience a bit of roll when going through the cloverleafs. Otherwise, it is a very nice riding vehicle for its class.

Stopping the RX is a smooth experience. A solid braking system yield-

ed good behaviors in normal, panic, and winter situations. The steering system feels good, offers a good turning radius and a solid on-center lock. Part of the latter comes from the Lane Keep Assist feature that uses the steering system to lock the RX in-between the lines as guided by sensors underneath the vehicle. Active safety features also include adaptive cruise control guided by a radar system, blind spot monitoring, a 360-degree camera system with a rear-view monitor and cross-traffic alerts, parking sensors front and back, and a pre-collision system with pedestrian detection. These are just to name a few of the technological leaps the Lexus RX undertook for this new edition.

Obviously, the Lexus RX will cost more than just a fine dinner for five and concert tickets for everyone. The base price of a front-drive RX 350 is \$41,900. The all-wheel drive RX 350 we tested came with a sticker price of \$55,690, including the luxury package and various other options. For the curious, hybrid RX 450h models start at \$52,235. F Sport versions of the RX 350 and RX 450h are a bit extra, \$49,125 and \$55,645 respectively.

The art of living luxurious should never be compromised. Like fine food, wine, and culture, there needs to be a compliment to that lifestyle. This has been the realm of the Lexus RX right from the start. This new 2016 version elevates the experience with new style, luxury, performance and technology.

As far as how the Lexus RX stacks up against the competition, consider how much it has done to cultivate its loyal ownership base. Now, consider how it continues to sell above all models in its class as well as being the sales leader of the brand. Luxury is a feeling of something special to behold and enjoy. That in itself describes the Lexus RX. This ideal continues with this new version. ■

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She Swiped Right (Finally)

It's a sunny Sunday morning and I'm sitting in the kitchen with my girlfriend's brother who is showing me the dating app Tinder.

He's straight and single, and he's an enthusiastic proponent of online dating. He displays his phone and flips through a blizzard of photos of single women — swiping right if he likes one, and left if he doesn't.

"If I reject one, I'll never see her again," he explains, merrily left-swiping one poor girl into oblivion. "Once she's rejected, Tinder will hide her from me forevermore."

"Well, I'm glad Tinder wasn't around when I first met your sister," I say. "If it was, we wouldn't be together today."

"How come?" he asks.

"Because, 26 years ago, she swiped left," I say.

I met her a quarter of a century ago in a pre-coming out group, which was designed to give women who were curious about the lifestyle a taste of gaydom before we decided whether we had a real appetite for it. It was sort of a nursery school for prospective lesbians.

This group proved to be one of the most important social experiences of my life. It's where I met several women who would become lifelong best friends.

And it's where I met the woman I would fall in love with — and stay in love with — for a quarter of a century, even though she was out of my reach for most of that time.

When we met, I was 25 and she was 24. We bumbled our way through a brief, charmingly innocent romance that left me hopelessly besotted, but which rattled her to the core. In 1990, it was still pretty scary to be gay, and much easier to embrace a conventional life than to take a chance on a wildcard like me.

So, she "ghosted me," as the kids today like to say, disappearing from my life for over two decades. I spent those decades in the wilderness, trying — and failing — to recapture the enchantment of those few months with her.

I didn't want to be in love with her. I tried to forget her. I regularly called myself stupid, a moron, a lunatic. Yet, the insults didn't work. She lurked on the periphery of my heart, shooing away anyone who tried to get too close to it.

Then, last year, on the 25th anniversary of our first kiss, magically (through the power of Facebook) we reconnected. And even more magically, she was no longer afraid. In fact, she was raring to go!

"What took you so long?" she asked soon after we reconnected. "I've been waiting for you."

Suddenly, all those years of fruitless searching made perfect sense. I could never find a replacement for her because one didn't exist. She is my person in this world, and I'm hers.

Just as I finish telling her brother this story, she pads into the kitchen wearing plush pajamas festooned in cartoon bears. She just woke up and is bleary-eyed. She glares at us, silently threatening us not to speak to her until after she has her coffee. She is not a morning person.

"What are you doing?" she asks, as her brother and I hover over his phone. She is pouring coffee into a mug, so it's now safe to speak.

"He's teaching me how to use Tinder," I say. "Seeing what else is out there in case you get in the mood to ghost me again."

She considers this for a moment while taking a long sip of coffee, and then walks over to me. With her index finger, she slowly swipes a line across my chest. "Too late," she says. "I swiped right. You're taken." ■

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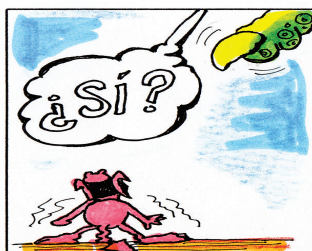
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Bullseye

I feel as if I have a target on my back.

Or maybe it's a bullseye on my left boob. Perhaps I'm just a sitting duck, waiting for that eventual lucky shot at my psyche.

Whatever may be the actual point of emotional penetration, I've got way more angst these days over how I and a million other trans folks are being singled out in many parts of the country.

As the Human Rights Campaign originally reported, and as Samantha Allen of *The Daily Beast* neatly summarized, as of late February, there were 44 anti-transgender bills being considered in 16 state legislatures. More than half of the proposed bills target trans kids, the most vulnerable of the vulnerable, by seeking to deny them access to the bathroom or locker room that conforms to their gender identity. More about this in a minute.

Things aren't so good for us trans adults, either. Exhibit A: a proposed Oklahoma law (HB 2215) that would require any transgender person who's undergone sex reassignment surgery to report the same when applying for a marriage license. In turn, under the proffered bill, "If either party reports on the application that they have undergone a (sic) sex reassignment or gender reassignment surgery, the marriage license issued by the court clerk shall state which party has undergone the surgery."

Think about it. Assuming this bill becomes law, if Ellie Krug married an Oklahoman (of course, what are the odds of that?), our marriage license would have a big fat notation suggesting to any reader that I wasn't *real*.

Still, stigma notwithstanding, at least I'd be able to marry in Oklahoma.

That wouldn't be the case in Tennessee if some legislators get their way with a proposed bill (HB 2600) that seeks to define what constitutes "husband" and "wife." Under this legislation, one must be a "natural-born male" or a "natural-born female" as defined by the person's original birth certificate. Given that Tennessee absolutely prohibits changing one's birth certificate in any way (meaning that even with gender reassignment surgery, a trans woman isn't able to convert a birth certificate from "male" to "female") this bill, if it became law, would effectively bar any transgender Tennessean from marrying.

Wow. Even I'm impressed by the audaciousness.

Other anti-trans laws range from restricting access to medical care to utilizing original birth certificates as the determinative factor on all matters. A Washington state bill (HB 2782) (which ultimately failed) involved some chromosomal nitty gritty: only persons having "male deoxyribonucleic acid" would be able to utilize male-oriented restrooms and other personal care facilities; similarly, female-oriented facilities would have been accessible only to persons with "female deoxyribonucleic acid."

On top of all of this are bills that contain a new version of the First

Amendment Defense Act (FADA), which heretofore had only been claimed by vendors and businesses seeking to avoid serving gay marriage clients on the basis of sincerely held religious beliefs or moral convictions. Now, there are a host of proposed laws allowing people to discriminate against trans persons if the discriminator (hater) has a sincere belief or conviction that one's biological sex is "distinct and immutable" and something determined only by "anatomy and genetics at the time of birth."

This FADA stuff is so incredibly dangerous; once "religious belief" is accepted as a legitimate basis to discriminate, where do we stop? After all, weren't the Founding Fathers morally convinced that God made black persons inferior? Isn't misogyny built into the Old Testament?

It scares me to death. Will I have to pin a pink star to my blazer on some future day of reckoning?

But that's nothing compared to what legislators and their supporters are doing to trans kids.

As time takes us further and further from the anti-marriage fight of 2012, fostering for gays and lesbians a greater sense of security, it's much easier to forget what it means to be a 15-year-old kid wrestling with gender identity, without support, totally alone and afraid.

And what does that kid hear from society relative to his/her/their value?

That they're not even worthy enough to pee in a place that matches their true, authentic self.

I understand that some in "mainstream" America (wherever the hell that is) are afraid of social change that legitimizes folks who are "different," especially when it comes to bathrooms, locker rooms, and school-related sports. I also get it that Sunday services are the week's high point for many. I even realize that there's a fair percentage of folks unhappy with themselves, thereby making it easier to marginalize others.

But we're talking about kids here — young people who lack perspective or resiliency or grit. We can't ignore that the legislative messaging from many quarters of this country is that trans kids don't matter; that their hopes and needs to live authentically must take a backseat to religion, bigotry, and ignorance.

How many trans kids do we need to lose to suicide or addiction before this madness ends?

I'd really like one of those bigoted legislators to answer that question.

As in immediately. ■

A shout-out to trans youth in Minnesota: contact Ellen (Ellie) Krug at ellenkrugwriter@gmail.com if your school has a gay-straight alliance (GSA) or other LGBTQ support group that's willing to sponsor Ellie. Assuming the logistics can be worked out, she would be happy to speak at your school about the value (and hard work) of living authentically. Her fee: gratis (one of those Latin words meaning "free").

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